

Losing the Moral Compass: Torture and *Guerre Révolutionnaire* in the Algerian War

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One of the keys to success in the US war on terror and counterinsurgency, in Iraq and around the world, is the ability to use intelligence to effectively target the adversary. Obtaining useful intelligence is one of the most important challenges of counterinsurgency operations. This requirement has focused attention on the interrogation of combatants captured on the battlefield and in raids on safe-houses in third-party states.

Almost from the beginning of US counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, accusations have been made that US interrogation techniques have included torture. Typical of the domestic reporting is an article in *Newsweek* in June 2004, titled “New Torture Furor,” which states that the US Defense Department was exploring legal means for justifying torture.¹ The foreign press has echoed what was reported in the United States, and expanded upon it. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* asserted that torture was rampant among US forces, and it represented the United States as “exempting itself from international criminal jurisdiction. While the rest of the world is expected to abide by the UN Convention against Torture, for example, the Americans evaluate international law on the basis of whether it serves their interests.”² This type of reporting is a strategic distraction and has the potential to cause a crisis in American foreign policy. It erodes international and domestic support and can embolden the enemy. Senior US officials have had to speak forcefully on the subject of torture to control the domestic and international damage, distracting their focus from the details of nation-building in Iraq. Secretary of

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State Condoleezza Rice has had to invest considerable effort in reaffirming that US policy officially prohibits torture and affirming American support for the UN Convention against Torture (CAT), indicating that “it [CAT] extends to US personnel wherever they are, whether they are in the US or outside the US.”³ Still, rumors and accusations persist that US forces routinely abuse prisoners. The French newspaper *Le Monde* reported in March 2006—without any hint of ambiguity—that the United States has condoned the “use of torture in secret prisons on foreign soil, and . . . justif[ied] the illegal treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay.”⁴

Torture also has been the subject of much domestic political debate in the United States, but this debate has largely been over the legality of interrogation techniques. The debate usually misses the central point illustrated by the negative impact of international reaction to reports of torture on US foreign affairs: in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations, although torture may bring about some short-term tactical and operational advantages, officially or unofficially condoning its use is a major strategic blunder. The disadvantages of sanctioned abuse or torture, or even the perception of torture, at the strategic level dwarf any short-term payoffs, regardless of technical legality. In counterterrorism and counterinsurgency warfare, the moral component of the fight is strategically decisive. Commanders are obligated to maintain both the reality and the perception of impeccable moral conduct within their commands. Senior commanders have the responsibility of ensuring that the tactics of their subordinates reinforce strategic goals and objectives.

History offers no modern examples of the strategic effectiveness of harsh interrogation techniques, but it is replete with examples of the negative strategic effects such techniques have on the counterinsurgency force. The French experience in Algeria from 1954 to 1962 is one of the clearest examples of how ill-conceived interrogation techniques contributed directly to the strategic failure of a counterinsurgency and the success of an insurgency.

In the Algerian War, a very sophisticated insurgent movement with many advantages opposed a modern and well-led counterinsurgency force. This clash of forces and doctrine revealed the effectiveness of well-considered counterinsurgency tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as showing how a lack of understanding of strategic vulnerabilities can negate tactical and oper-

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ational success. It also demonstrated that the particular stresses of counterinsurgency operations, especially the quest for good intelligence, can challenge the professionalism of the counterinsurgency force. If these stresses are not surmounted by a clear and well-articulated professional ethic and aggressive senior leadership, the strategic consequences can be disastrous.

Background

The French Army occupied Algeria for more than a hundred years prior to the beginning of the war in 1954. France became involved in Algeria in the 1830s and achieved effective control over the area when French General Thomas Robert Bugeaud led a French expeditionary force that conquered the native forces of the Arab leader Abd-el-Kader in 1847. In 1848 the French declared Algeria an integral part of France and organized it into three departments. Despite this official incorporation, the local population was not completely subjugated until well into the 1870s.⁵ Banditry persisted in the border regions of Algeria well into the 20th century.

Algeria's subjugation by French military force was an ominous beginning to the relationship between the French and Algerian peoples. The French view of this relationship was strikingly myopic and self-absorbed. Rather than recognize and mitigate the animosity of the indigenous population, the French deliberately took steps to politically and economically marginalize the Muslim inhabitants. Inexplicably, at the same time that they were denying the majority population political rights equal to Europeans, the French proceeded to politically absorb Algeria, not as a colony of France as might be expected, but rather as a province of France. Part of the reason for these unusual and contradictory policies is the geography of Algeria.

Algeria is located, at its nearest point, only two hours' flying time from France. Thus the important agricultural coastal plain of Algeria north of the Atlas Mountains, an area of about 40,000 square miles where over 90 percent of the population was located, was closer to France in terms of simple distance than were many parts of Europe. The coastal plain was the part of Algeria in which France was most interested. South of the coastal plain was the significant barrier of the Atlas Mountains and then beyond the mountains lay hundreds of thousands of square miles of virtually uninhabitable Sahara Desert.

Another reason for the unusual French interest in Algeria was its large European population. These inhabitants, known as the *pied noirs* or *colonists*, were European immigrants to Algeria. They came from European communities all along the northern Mediterranean coast. They adopted the French language, culture, and citizenship, and were predominantly Roman Catholic. By 1954 this group was the most economically and politically powerful segment of the population. They had all the political rights of French cit-

izens. The one million *colons* made up approximately ten percent of the total Algerian population.

When the French arrived in Algeria in 1830 they found two distinct non-European populations living in the region. The first were the Berbers. The Berbers were the indigenous population that had lived in the region since antiquity.⁶ They spoke a unique language and had a distinct tribal-centric culture. They were located in the foothills and mountains away from the coast. The second important population in the region was the Arabs. They were primarily traders and managed their trade through the seaports, by land along the coast, and by caravan into the mountains and through the desert into Africa. Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Arabs were the dominant group in the region and were predominantly located in the immediate coastal areas, cities, and towns. The Arab population brought to the region the one characteristic that provided a unifying identity to the population of Algeria, and that was Islam.

Insurgent Doctrine

The Algerian resistance to French rule had a long history dating to the French arrival and was often characterized by open hostilities. Uprisings against the French were brutally suppressed by the French Army. In 1945 a small riot took place in the city of Setif, sparked by nationalistic expressions during a World War II victory parade. The French response was typically extreme and included martial law, wholesale arrests, and military force including air attacks. Moderate estimates counted over 6,000 Algerians killed.⁷ The violent overreaction by the French at Setif became a rallying cry for Algerian separatists.⁸ Over the next several years various independence movements formed, were broken up by French police, reformed, and consolidated. By 1954 the *Front de Libération Nationale*, the FLN, had emerged as the composite group with the greatest organization and popular support.

Some analysts believe that the FLN, though schooled in Maoist insurgent theory, did not consciously pursue a Maoist three-stage insurgency strategy. Regardless of conscious intent, the evidence appears to indicate that the course of events in Algeria followed relatively closely the three-stage model advocated by Mao. In the first stage, the FLN eliminated or absorbed rival nationalistic movements and began to build a base among the poor Arab and Berber population. This initially occurred in remote areas far from French control and eventually expanded into the urban centers where French control was complete. During the course of the eight-year struggle, the FLN's politicking among the population was unceasing. In the second phase, small bands executed hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, including urban terrorism. These tactics were designed to win additional followers, provoke an overreaction from French forces, and to materially damage the prestige and structure of French

governmental institutions—particularly local government and police. In the final stage, the military arm of the FLN, the ALN, sought to control territory and defeat French units in conventional battle.

The FLN strategy also included a strategic information plan. This was an added dimension to Maoist insurgency strategy. The FLN waged an aggressive propaganda campaign not just at the local tactical level but also at the strategic level. At the tactical level the target audience was the Muslim population. The purpose of this campaign was to win local popular support. Simultaneously the FLN waged a strategic campaign that had two different target audiences: the international community represented by the United Nations, and the French population. The purpose of this strategic campaign was to undermine international and French domestic political support for the war. The technique of the FLN was to attack the legitimacy of the French occupation by focusing on the inequity of political power and the undemocratic methods used by France to govern Algeria. The FLN also highlighted the illegal and immoral use of force by the French Army. Allegations of the torture and killing of prisoners by the French were a major subject of FLN propaganda.

French Army Doctrine

At the beginning of the war, French forces in the country did not completely understand the nature of the enemy with which they were engaged. The initial actions of the FLN were viewed as criminal terrorism to be dealt with by the police. By 1956 the French recognized the scale and effectiveness of the insurgency, and the French response was large but conventional military operations. These proved generally ineffective against the insurgency, which by then had been active for two years, was well organized, and was skilled in conducting hit-and-run guerilla operations.

Beginning in 1956 the French started to adjust their tactics and operational approach.⁹ This was mainly due to the arrival in theater of experienced officers and troops from Indochina who understood the Maoist approach to revolutionary warfare. The new French leaders began to informally articulate a counterinsurgency doctrine known as *guerre révolutionnaire*, and the tactics, techniques, and procedures to implement it.

Guerre révolutionnaire was not a formally adopted doctrine of the French Army. Rather, it was a counterinsurgency doctrine articulated by influential French officers and disseminated unofficially through association and private and professional writing. The crux of the new doctrine was that the objective of the army was the support and allegiance of the people. This support had to be won by providing a promising alternative ideology to the population. That ideology was a liberal French democratic ideology with strong Christian overtones.

The tactics that supported the French doctrine were in general very effective. These tactics rested on five key counterinsurgency fundamentals: isolating the insurgency from support; providing local security; executing effective strike operations; establishing French political legitimacy and effective indigenous political and military forces; and establishing a robust intelligence capability.

The French understood that the insurgency had to be isolated from support. At the operational level, the French constructed the Morice Line along the Tunisian border, and similar fortifications were also built along the Moroccan border. These static, fence, minefield, and guard tower positions were reinforced by mobile patrols, aerial reconnaissance, and powerful mobile reaction forces. Their purpose was the strategic isolation of the insurgency from external support. They were very expensive, but also very effective in denying material aid as well as preventing an estimated 35,000 trained fighters from moving from bases in Tunisia and Morocco into Algeria to support the insurgency. Attempts to breach Algeria's borders were decisively defeated by French air power, artillery, and reaction forces.

With the insurgency isolated within the borders of Algeria, the French focused on elimination of the internal insurgent cells. Operations were mounted to provide security for citizens and facilities. These operations included passive checkpoints and defenses as well as patrols to locate and intercept insurgents. These activities were accomplished by organizing the country using what was called the *quadrillage* system. This system divided the country into quadrants. Each quadrant was assigned a garrison force which provided security within the quadrant through static positions and mobile patrols. The garrison had the primary mission of providing security tailored to the threat and needs of their area of operations.

Backing up the *quadrillage* system was a mobile strike reserve of elite mechanized, airborne, and Foreign Legion forces. These units could move rapidly anywhere in the country to reinforce local security forces. Their primary purpose was to conduct strike operations against key insurgent targets when they were identified. Because of their mobility and their elite personnel, they were very effective in this role.

Also existing in each quadrant, but separate from the garrison security forces, were Special Administrative Sections (SAS). These units worked to establish French political legitimacy among the local population and to build indigenous democratic institutions. They reformed local government, set up medical services, and trained local officials and police forces. The SAS also were heavily engaged in education. They were integral to reestablishing local educational institutions, to building and monitoring schools, and they made great efforts to emphasize democratic ideals to the Algerian youth.

Another area of SAS responsibilities was training *harka* forces. *Harkas* were indigenous military units that could provide local security, and, as they became better trained, could conduct offensive operations against the insurgents. As *harka* units stood up and proved themselves, they relieved regular French Army forces in a security role. Because of their extensive contacts with the local population, the SAS units also became an important hub of intelligence information. At the conclusion of the Algerian war the SAS detachments, usually led by captains and lieutenants, were considered by both the French and the Algerian insurgents to constitute one of the most important and effective counterinsurgency programs. The political and social impact of the SAS was felt among Algerians long after the war.¹⁰

Backing up the French tactical and operational systems was an increasingly robust human intelligence (HUMINT) system. This system was multilayered, including local loyal Algerians, turned former FLN members, paid informers, and aggressive interrogation and detention practices. It was linked to strategic intelligence operations in France as well as to the intelligence operations of other nations—notably Israel. It was managed by a combination of SAS, police and constabulary forces, and unit intelligence officers. The key to the success of the intelligence system was the rapid dissemination of critical information to strike units. The French standard was to strike at targets identified through their intelligence system within hours of uncovering the information. High-stress interrogation techniques and torture were an integral part of this system—and its major defect. The failure of the French to recognize this flaw would have immense strategic consequences.

The French adapted their operations and tactics, techniques, and procedures in recognition of the importance of intelligence. They adjusted their organizations to ensure that the most competent and qualified officers were assigned to the intelligence positions. The intelligence staff positions became in effect the key operational staff positions in battalion-level organizations and higher. The French ensured that intelligence was linked tightly to the elite mobile forces. They understood the fleeting nature of good intelligence and thus developed the ability to react to acquired intelligence quickly with their mobile strike units. The French recognized that human intelligence was most important. They built multiple, overlapping layers of HUMINT networks to provide and reference information. They also understood that the environment in which the insurgents operated was the population. The French Army therefore sought to organize that environment. This took the form of a very detailed and accurate documentation of the population. Censuses were conducted and identification cards were issued that enabled files to be established on the civilian population and gave the army the ability to track individuals within the population.

The French Army implemented its doctrine and supporting tactics with increasing effectiveness beginning in 1957. The insurgency found itself unable to bring supplies and personnel across the Algerian borders. The groups already within the country found it harder to operate. Where once they were able to assemble in battalion-strength numbers, the *quadrillage* system caused them to break down into increasingly smaller groups to avoid detection and retain mobility. Every time the Algerians attempted to move to phase-three operations—conventional operations—they were decisively crushed by mobile French reaction units and air power. By 1959 the insurgency had lost its capability to operate except in isolated small cells. Many of the leaders of the insurgency had been identified and located by the French intelligence system. They were imprisoned, turned, or killed. Those insurgents still able to operate were reduced to mounting limited, uncoordinated terror attacks, and even these became more difficult and less frequent. *Harka* units became increasingly effective, and in the areas where they operated the insurgents found it impossible to hide among the local population. By 1960 the French Army had essentially eliminated the insurgents' ability to conduct effective military operations and had significantly degraded the insurgent organization in Algeria. From a purely military point of view, the French Army had pacified the country.

Despite this success, the French Army had unknowingly sown the seeds for losing the war. Though pacified, the Algerian Muslim population was less inclined to accept French rule in 1960 than they were in 1954. By 1960 a significant portion of the French population and body politic that had supported the war in 1954 had turned against the government's Algerian policy. Within the army itself, dissension ran rampant as various factions viewed government policy as too aggressive, not aggressive enough, or immoral. All of these conditions were directly or indirectly related to command policies which condoned harsh tactical interrogation techniques including torture.

Flaws in the French Approach

French doctrine, tactics, and procedures had fundamental weaknesses that ultimately contributed to the loss of Algeria and almost led to civil war in France. One weakness was an incomplete understanding of counterinsurgency at the strategic level. The French doctrine overemphasized the spiritual and ideological component of the struggle between the insurgency and the French Army. It also did not account for strategic information operations. French General Jacques de Bollardiere, a veteran of World War II and Dien Bien Phu and a contemporary critic of *guerre révolutionnaire*, commented that the French Army had lost the ability to “coldly [analyze] with courageous lucidity its strategic and tactical errors.”¹¹ These factors, combined with the

previous humiliating national defeats at the hands of the Germans and Vietnamese, caused many leaders in the French Army to view operational success in Algeria in stark terms. They believed that the army and France itself could not survive another military defeat, and thus all necessary means were justified to ensure victory. These circumstances inclined many of the army's leaders toward condoning torture as a tactical intelligence technique. These conditions also made many in the French Army blind to the linkage between tactical methods and strategic outcomes.

A major weakness of the French strategy is that it contained the assumption that the primary ideological focus of the insurgents was Marxist communism. It did not account for an ideological motive based on indigenous nationalism and anti-colonialism. Also, the Christian religious overtones of *guerre révolutionnaire* were unattractive to Muslims. Thus, though the doctrine correctly identified the end which was the strategic focus of French operations—the population—the means the doctrine advocated to influence the people were fundamentally flawed.¹²

The ideological and spiritual nature of the conflict was internalized by many in the French Army and became one justification for torture. They saw the enemy as communist and therefore as inherently evil. The struggle was one of ultimate national and ideological survival. A leading French counterinsurgency theorist at the time stated, “We want to halt the decadence of the West and the march of communism. That is our duty, the real duty of the army. That is why we must win the war in Algeria. Indochina taught us to see the truth.”¹³ This extremely ideological view of the war justified any tactical technique, regardless of its illegality or immorality, in order to achieve success. One French officer testified that young officers “were told that the end justifies the means,” and that, regarding torture, “France’s victory depended on it.”¹⁴ Many French Army leaders believed that the extremely high stakes of strategic success or failure justified moral compromise at the tactical level.

Another justification for torture was that insurgent warfare was completely different from conventional warfare, and therefore required a different operating approach: “Conventional patriotism and *esprit de corps* were inadequate weapons against revolutionary élan.”¹⁵ In accordance with this view, the laws of conventional land warfare were considered inappropriate and countereffective in the context of counterinsurgency warfare. The French also understood the primacy of HUMINT to successful counterinsurgency. And they believed torture was an effective way to quickly get tactical intelligence information. This combination of perceptions led to the official condoning of torture.

A third justification for torture was that it was a controlled application of violence used for the limited purpose of quickly gaining tactical in-

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telligence. Toward this end some French officers subjected themselves to electric shock to ensure they understood the level of violence they were applying to prisoners. What these officers did not understand was the huge difference between pain inflicted in a limited, controlled manner without psychological stress, and pain inflicted in an adversarial environment where the prisoner is totally under the control of the captor. They also failed to understand that once violence is permitted to be exercised beyond the standards of legitimately recognized moral and legal bounds, it becomes exponentially more difficult to control. In Algeria, officially condoned torture quickly escalated to prolonged abuse, which resulted in permanent physical and psychological damage as well as death.

The official condoning of torture by French Army leaders had numerous negative effects that were not envisioned because of the army leadership’s intensive focus on tactical success. The negative results of torture included decreasing France’s ability to affect the conflict’s strategic center of gravity; internal fragmentation of the French Army officer corps; decreased moral authority of the army; setting the conditions for even greater violations of moral and legal authority; and providing a major information operations opportunity to the insurgency. The irony is that even though some tactical successes can be attributed to their use of torture, the French had numerous other effective HUMINT techniques and were far from reliant on torture for tactical success.

French doctrine and counterinsurgency theorists recognized at the time that the goal of both the insurgents and the counterinsurgents, the center of gravity for both, was the support of the population. French Major Roger Trinquier, a participant in counterinsurgency in Vietnam and Algeria and an intelligence expert, wrote, “We know that the sine qua non of victory in modern warfare [insurgency and counterinsurgency] is the unconditional support of a population.”¹⁶ Despite this knowledge, many French commanders tolerated or encouraged widespread and often random torture. By one estimate, 40 percent of the adult male Muslim population of Algiers (approximately 55,000 individuals) were put through the French interrogation system and ei-

ther tortured or threatened with torture between 1956 and 1957. This action likely irrevocably alienated the entire 600,000 Muslim population of the city from the French cause. The French did not understand the link between their tactical procedures and the strategic center of gravity.

Condoning illegal and immoral practices also destroyed the internal integrity of the officer corps. The officer corps was divided into two camps—those who opposed the unlawful activity and those who professed that it was necessary in a new age of warfare. Within the officer corps, opposition to the tactics of the army in Algeria was considered by many to be both disloyal and operationally naïve. In some cases officers in the former camp were forced to resign or had their careers damaged for voicing their concerns. General Jacques Paris de la Bollardière, serving as prefect of Algiers in 1957, resigned his post over the torture tactics used within the city. He also went public, stating that the tactics undermined French moral authority. He was sentenced by a military court to 60 days of detention for criticizing the army in public.¹⁷ Army chaplains protested to their bishops regarding the immoral behavior of some army officers and units.¹⁸ Ultimately the officers loyal to the government and to the rule of law prevailed; however, clarity on this issue was never truly obtained within the army. Some officers who were closely associated with extreme interrogation techniques, such as General Jacques Massu, commander of the 10th Paratroop Division, went on to high rank and important NATO command positions after the war.

Torture deprived the army of its moral authority. Not only did it undermine support among the Algerian population, it also eroded support for the army on the home front. By 1961 there were widespread protests by the French civilian population against the army, the war in general, and against army torture in particular. Former soldiers were closely associated with these protests. Politicians lost confidence in the army's view of the war, and the army was not seriously consulted as the government devised a political solution to the conflict.

Rationalizing the permission of torture as a tactical operational necessity to achieve a greater operational or strategic aim soon was applied to justify even greater crimes. These included the murder of prominent prisoners such as the FLN leader in Algiers, Larbi Ben M'Hidi; retired French General Paul Aussaresses admitted personally hanging him in a farm outside of Algiers because "a trial was not a good idea."¹⁹ Little consideration for morality, law, or strategic consequences entered into Aussaresses' description of the army's decision to kill M'Hidi. Ultimately, senior French commanders became willing even to take up arms against their own government and in effect against the French people when they perceived these to be obstacles to success in Algeria and obstacles in the death struggle against communism.

The accelerating trend to sanctioned lawlessness within the army culminated in 1961 with an aborted coup attempt involving elements of the French Army. The coup was prompted by the announcement by French President Charles DeGaulle that he would permit a free and open vote in Algeria in which the people could choose independence or could choose to remain part of France. Army leaders knew that the more numerous Muslim population would vote for independence. The government was permitting the democratic process to give the insurgents that which they were unable to achieve by force of arms. Despite the overwhelming popularity of this policy in France, army leaders in Algeria decided to try to overthrow the French government to prevent this from happening.

The coup was led by former army generals and supported in the army by a cabal of colonels commanding some of the army's most respected elite units. The coup was aborted when key officers vacillated and units failed to support the conspirators. The mutineers were tried in military court, and more than a half dozen general officers were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Three of the most senior generals who fled French custody were sentenced to death in absentia.²⁰ Ultimately, the logic of the mutineers derived from the same flawed logic that permitted them to abuse individuals in pursuit of a moral and lawful strategic objective.

The policy of condoning torture provided the FLN with an incredible opportunity to propagandize against the French Army and French policy. This propaganda was extremely effective inside Algeria among the Muslim population, and it was equally effective in the United Nations and in the French media. The French Army did not appreciate the political effectiveness of strategic information operations. Again, the advocates of *guerre révolutionnaire* were not able to envision the linkages between their tactical techniques and the strategic level of war.

Conclusions

The Algerian War contains numerous lessons. The French demonstrated that aggressive tactical counterinsurgency operations facilitated by accurate intelligence can effectively eliminate the military capability of the insurgents, yet will not win the war. The French experience revealed that torture is only marginally effective and has tremendous negative strategic consequences. Finally, the Algerian conflict showed the clear and direct links between how counterinsurgency operations are executed tactically and the attainment of strategic objectives. The strategic level of war must dictate the manner in which tactical operations are conducted.

The Algerian experience validates the conclusion that the fight for the loyalty of the people is the main effort in insurgency warfare. This main

effort is not just a military effort. In fact, the effort to win the loyalty of the population is primarily a political, economic, and information-based task. In their effort to win the loyalty of the people of Algeria, the French were decisively defeated.

The French Army's nominal acceptance of torture as an intelligence-gathering technique was fundamentally flawed. The inability of many French officers to recognize this fact represented moral weakness and professional incompetence by many in the French Army's senior leadership. The inability to establish a command climate conducive to disciplined counterinsurgency efforts was a profound weakness. The army's failure to accurately review its performance in Indochina, to assess lessons from the application of different approaches by other colonial powers, or to adjust doctrinal concepts based on its own experience did not mark it as an effective learning organization. Nor did the army exhibit the ability to assess or acknowledge the larger strategic context between France and Algeria. Victory was defined in military rather than political terms, without regard to costs or means.

Despite their tactical successes, the French lost the war. The insurgents were able to achieve politically and strategically what they were unable to achieve tactically and militarily because of the French Army's inability to appreciate the strategic context of the war. Had the army been more politically astute or conscious of the internal corrosion fomented by their aggressive interrogation techniques and indiscriminate use of force, they may have been able to snatch victory from a difficult situation. Instead, their tactical successes only undercut the French political aim and their own moral foundation and legitimacy. Senior leaders are charged with ensuring the synergy between tactics, operations, and strategy. Firmer and more ethically founded leadership, clearly articulating and enforcing professional standards, could have prevented the strategic dilemmas caused by the army's tactics.

As the US government debates the merits of harsh interrogation techniques today, it should be careful to not limit the debate to a technical discussion of legal matters. The key questions that should drive American policy are those of operational and strategic effectiveness. Harsh interrogation can provide some valuable tactical and operational intelligence. However, the advantages that such intelligence provides may be totally negated by a plethora of strategic dangers arising from the methods used to gain it. These dangers include effects on military and political cohesion; national and international legitimacy; and, most important, decisive negative effects on the hearts and minds of the population. As discussed previously, isolated cases of abuse and rumors of torture in the Global War on Terrorism have chipped away at international perceptions of US legitimacy, and, as recent polling tends to indicate, they have contributed to the decline in domestic support for the US counterin-

surgency effort. US Representative John Murtha cites “incoherent messages from the very top of the American government regarding the use of torture” as one of the reasons for his opposition to continued US operations in Iraq.²¹

American leaders must understand that in counterinsurgency war, the moral component can be strategically decisive. They must ensure that they provide clear ethical guidance to young soldiers and officers who operate in the stressful and obscure tactical counterinsurgency environment.

The French government under Charles DeGaulle recognized the internal discord and corrosion created both in the army and the nation by the conflict in Algeria. The army’s ambivalent view of torture contributed to these conditions. DeGaulle had the political insight to understand that despite a favorable military situation, the war was politically lost. He stated that the FLN had “created a spirit; hence a people; hence a policy; hence a state.”²² In March 1962 the FLN and the French government agreed to a cease-fire, and France recognized the right of Algerian independence. On 1 July 1962 the Algerian people voted overwhelmingly for independence from France.

NOTES

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